



Confessions of a Full-Time Indian

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Confessions of a Full-Time Indian

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When it comes to funds of knowledge, I'm wary of miscegenation. Especially suspect is the miscegenation between Indigenous and Western constructions of knowledge whereby Indigenous formations are recast within Eurocentric frames. Given the (racist) genealogy of purist discourses and practices, I come to this supposition uneasily. However, I struggle to find an alternative language that carries the same asymmetries of power and politics captured by the notion of miscegenation. Other terms—*integration*, *accommodation*, *reconciliation*, *incorporation*, and *amalgamation*—only seem to domesticate the violent collision of competing moral visions; of epistemicide (de Sousa Santos, 1995). So, while I consciously tread on unstable and potentially divisive ground, I gratefully accept this opportunity to think out loud about the borders and boundaries of knowledge(s), their apposite permeability, and methods and means of cross-pollination.

To begin, the proposed project of “Browning the curriculum” suggests a racialized relationship between knowledge, power, and identity, making the implicit claim that curricular studies remains predominantly White or perhaps Eurocentric. The academy is an invention of the West and, in the case of Indigenous peoples, was expressly designed for our evisceration: “Kill the Indian, save the man.” Thus, tensions around issues of race, power, and

knowledge run high, fueled by the central claim that Western and Indigenous funds of knowledge are ontologically distinctive if not irreconcilable, carrying deeply embedded differences in how time, space, history, and human nature are understood.

In this context, efforts to indigenize the academy are earnestly undertaken, engaging a politics of inclusion and representation by which campus long houses are built, Native studies courses added, Indigenous programming implemented and (miscegenist) arguments also levied to count ceremony as research, storytelling as methodology, and ritual as text. While such efforts are primarily driven by the laudable goal of carving out Native spaces within the institution, I argue that they ultimately serve assimilationist ends, specifically: (a) at the same time the institution exploits the labor of Native students, staff, and faculty to make “change,” its own structures and frames of intelligibility remain intact; (b) the lack of structural change allows the institution to cash in on the marketing of diversity at the same time it resists its imperatives; and (c) it consigns Native scholars to the role of functional notary, authorizing intellectual easements between Western/Eurocentric and Indigenous funds of knowledge. While easements are intended only to provide rights of usage without possession, they are, like other conditions of property, subject to the vagaries of power. Once access is provided, there is little to no protection from encroachment, accommodation, or commodification.

As such, it is imperative to see the preoccupation with Eurocentrism and its ancillary projects (i.e. Indigenizing, Browning) for the Trojan horse that it is—a ruse to entice the marginalized, under their own volition, into the (decaying) center. Particularly in this colonial present, when the forces of neoliberalism do not simply devour competing sources of knowledge but also compel self-destruction, we need even greater vigilance about what we invite within, where we dedicate our labor, and what constitutes a symbol of victory. Thus, as the decade of disaster comes to a close, now it is most critical for Indigenous scholars to abandon the easement business—to desist from explaining away our ways of knowing the world, and leave Indigenous knowledges where they belong: in Indigenous communities. We not only owe it to our peoples, but also to the broader decolonial project as Indigenous claims to prior and continued sovereignty represent the only significant challenge to the source and legitimacy of out-of-control state authority (Iverson, Patton, & Sanders, 2000). Our very being confounds the infamous Thatcher-ism that “there is no alternative.” We are the “alter-Native.”

Thus, it is time for Indigenous scholars to wage a Gramscian “war of position,” taking our place as “word warriors” on the front lines (Turner, 2006). According to Turner, *word warriors* are “American Indians educated in the White man’s ways of thinking” and intellectual discourses for the express purpose of “asserting and defending the rights, sovereignty and nationhood of Indigenous communities” (as quoted in Yancy, 2007, p. 207). One need

only look as far as the Zapatista movement to gauge the effectiveness of this particular stratagem. Within their struggle, Indigenous knowledge systems have not taken center stage, but rather they have waged their war of position from the wide deployment of Western theory and the assertion of Indigenous sovereignty within the dominant discourses of rights and democracy. Integration or accommodation of the Zapatista into the Mexican state is not, nor has it ever been, the end goal. Rather, the primary objective is the disruption of global capitalism and its colonizing effects.

Given today's headlines, I understand the need to tread lightly with any allusions to war or revolution. But, a Gramscian project is about ideas and a reassertion of intellectualism. With the struggles of the day fueled by the senseless and ceaseless vitriol of party-line sophists, a resurrection of intellectualism and a resuscitation of the dialectic are essential. It is also worth reminding ourselves that the dialectic requires competing moral visions and funds of knowledge to stay discrete. This shifts the relation away from miscegenation and the politics of absorption toward the engagement of mutually exclusive but relevant explanatory frameworks: the dissertation versus the ceremony, the text versus ritual, storytelling versus research.

The curriculum is, by definition, a Western (linear, temporal, hierarchical) construct that can and should be continually reimagined to better serve democratic imperatives. But it will never be Indigenous. And, if it ever is, we will have disappeared.

CONTRIBUTOR

Sandy Grande is currently working on developing an Indigenous Think Tank, with a home location in New York City. Her research and teaching are profoundly inter-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary and interface critical and Indigenous theories of education with the concerns of Indigenous education. Her book, *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought* (2004, Rowman and Littlefield) has been met with critical acclaim. She has also published several articles including "Critical Theory and American Indian Identity and Intellectualism," in *The International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, and "American Indian Geographies of Identity and Power: At the Crossroads of Indigena and Mestizaje," in *Harvard Educational Review*.

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